

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-UT-C010-2015-0042**

June 2015

Utah Prairie Dog Translocation/Nest Boxes

Location: Iron County, Utah

Applicant/Address: None

**Cedar City Field Office
176 East DL Sargent Drive
Cedar City, Utah 84721
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

INTRODUCTION

The Utah prairie dog is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Translocation of Utah prairie dogs is proposed for three new Utah prairie dog translocation sites within or near the Upper Long Hollow, Adams Well and Bald Hills Management Units (Appendix A). This would allow for the removal of Utah prairie dogs from private lands and their release onto public lands within Iron County. The selection of a translocation site should be located close enough to an existing colony to allow for genetic mixing and recolonization, but far enough away to limit the risk of exposure to plague. The Utah Prairie Dog 5-Year Management Unit Plan has identified these areas as important for recovery of the species.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the proposed action is to increase the number of prairie dog colonies in new locations across the species range. The translocations are needed to support recovery of the species as required by the Endangered Species Act.

CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN(S)

The proposed action and alternatives described below are in conformance with the Cedar Beaver Garfield Antimony Resource Management Plan approved in 1986. They conform with the rationale in the wildlife section of which states, “BLM is charged with managing wildlife habitat on public land to maintain or improve species diversity and to protect threatened and endangered species”.

RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS

The Proposed Action is consistent with federal, state and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible, including the following:

- Taylor Grazing Act of 1934
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976
- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended
- Memorandum of Understanding Between the BLM CCFO and Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah
- Utah Prairie Dog Revised Recovery Plan 2012
- Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), as amended.
- BLM Manual 6840- Special Status Species Management

Utah's Standards for Rangeland Health address upland soils, riparian/wetlands, desired and native species and water quality. These resources are either analyzed later in this document or, if not impacted, are listed in the attached Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record (Appendix B).

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This environmental assessment focuses on the proposed and no action alternatives. Other alternatives were not considered because the issues identified during scoping did not indicate a need for additional alternatives or mitigation beyond those contained in the proposed action. The no action alternative is considered and analyzed to provide a baseline for comparison of the impacts of the proposed action.

PROPOSED ACTION

The BLM Cedar City Field Office proposes to build three new Utah prairie dog translocation sites within or near the Upper Long Hollow and Adams Well Management Units (see Appendix A). This would allow for the removal of Utah prairie dogs from private lands and their release onto public lands within Iron County.

Each release location would include both artificial burrows and nest boxes, or contain unoccupied Utah prairie dog burrows. The sites would be generally less than one acre in size; approximately 200-400 Utah prairie dogs would be released per year for three consecutive years. Fewer numbers may be released if the translocation is supplementing an existing population.

Approximately one acre of vegetation would be removed in preparation to build the sites. Please refer to "Recommended Translocation Procedures for Utah Prairie Dog", for additional details and procedures and a diagram of artificial burrows. Other activities, as described in the Translocation Procedures, may occur, including supplemental food and water. Translocation activities would generally occur between July 1 and August 31. Translocation sites would meet the vegetation criteria identified in the "Interim Vegetation Composition Recommendations for Utah Prairie Dog Habitat".

Three translocation sites have been proposed. The proposed sites would be available for use in 2015, or as soon as approved, and remain available until 2017.

The following Design Features would apply to translocation activities:

- Translocation sites would be accessed by use of existing roads and primitive routes;
- Release locations may be accessed by motorized vehicle from the nearest road or primitive route;
- Cross country travel would be minimized as much as possible;
- Parking and staging of vehicles would avoid sagebrush;
- Any equipment exposed to noxious weeds before entry onto BLM lands would be cleaned of noxious weed seed (washed) prior to use;

- Noxious weed area would be avoided during all project activities;
- Release locations within 1 mile of greater sage-grouse leks would not be prepared (installation of artificial burrows or any other activities) during the period February 15 through May 15;
- If established burrow systems are used as release locations, Utah prairie dogs would not be released into burrows known to be occupied by burrowing owls;
- Livestock grazing permittees would be notified prior to implementation of any translocation activity;
- Supplemental food, if provided, would be weed-free; and
- Restoration needs would be evaluated and implemented after translocations ceased.
- Translocation sites would be located at least ½ mile away from existing range improvement projects (troughs, ponds, wells, pipelines, etc.)
- Utah prairie dog nest boxes would not be constructed in seedings that have not been established for more than 2 growing seasons.
- Abandoned nest boxes would be removed and reclaimed.

Translocation sites would be reseeded, using the following seed mix, after nest box installment and again during nest box removal if the initial seeding was determined unsuccessful.

This seed mix is appropriate for drilling or broadcasting in upland ecological sites

Seed Mix		Status	Pounds/Acre
Grasses	Thickspike Wheatgrass	Native	1.50 lbs/acre
	Galleta Grass	Native	0.50 lbs/acre
	Bluebunch Wheatgrass	Native	1.50 lbs/acre
	Western Wheatgrass	Native	1.00 lbs/acre
	Pubescent Wheatgrass	Non-Native	1.50 lbs/acre
	Indian Ricegrass	Native	2.00 lbs/acre
	Bottlebrush Squirrealtail	Native	0.50 lbs/acre
	Needleandthread grass	Native	1.00 lbs/acre
Forbs	Western Yarrow	Native	0.25 lbs/acre
	Milkvetch	Native	0.50 lbs/acre
	Small Burnet	Non-Native	1.50 lbs/acre
	Lewis Flax	Native	0.50 lbs/acre
	Alfalfa	Native	1.00 lbs/acre
	Cicer Milkvetch	Native	0.25 lbs/acre
	Yellow Sweetclover	Non-Native	0.50 lbs/acre
	Palmer Penstemon	Native	0.50 lbs/acre
Total			14.50 lbs/acre

Substitutions, if necessary, include intermediate wheatgrass, Snake River wheatgrass, native milkvetch, and firecracker penstemon.

NO ACTION

Under the No Action Alternative no release locations would be constructed. The release of approximately 200-1200 Utah prairie dogs would not occur.

CHAPTER 3

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING

The affected environment was considered and analyzed by an interdisciplinary team as documented in the Interdisciplinary Team Checklist. The checklist indicates which resources of concern are either not present in the project area or would not be impacted to a degree that requires detailed analysis. Resources which could be impacted to a level requiring further analysis are described in Chapter 3 and impacts on these resources are analyzed in Chapter 4 below.

The resources which are expected to be affected by the proposed action are soils, special status wildlife species and livestock grazing. The site currently consists of a variety of grasses and forbs, with few plants over six inches tall.

Livestock

The translocation sites would be located in the Lowe Jones and Minersville 5 allotments. The Lowe Jones Allotment is comprised of two pastures and has a two-year deferred rotation grazing system. The Minersville 5 Allotment consists of both east and west pastures. The east pasture or portion of the Minersville 5 Allotment is comprised of three pastures and has a three-year deferred rotation grazing system. The rotation systems for the Lowe Jones and Minersville 5 allotments ensure that each pasture is rested from livestock grazing during the critical spring growing period.

Allotment	Acres	AUMs	Season of Use
Lowe Jones	4,395	173 cattle	10/16 – 4/30
Minersville #5	24,289	2,301 cattle	04/16 – 10/15

Soils

The soils at the proposed translocation sites are predominately classified as Upland Stony Loam sites. The soils in the project area are somewhat variable in rock size and content and depth. The soils at the proposed sites have been identified as suitable for Utah prairie dog translocation.

Special Status Wildlife

All three sites are located in the Bald Hills greater sage-grouse population area and are mapped as occupied and brood-rearing habitat by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

Each site will provide habitat for the Utah prairie dog, which is listed as a Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Adam's Well translocation site is located in the Adams Well Utah Prairie Dog Management Unit. The Ryan's Springs translocation sites are located near the Upper Long Hollow Utah Prairie Dog Management Unit.

CHAPTER 4

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS

PROPOSED ACTION

This section analyzes the impacts of the proposed action to those potentially impacting resources described in the affected environment Chapter 3, above.

Livestock Grazing

The Lowe Jones and Minersville 5 allotments contain existing Utah prairie dog colonies. The Lowe Jones Allotment grazing permit includes permit stipulations which address Utah prairie dog habitat but those stipulations are not currently on the Minersville 5 Allotment permit. The addition of Utah Prairie Dog stipulations would be expected to change the Terms and Conditions of the Minersville 5 permit.

The translocation of Utah prairie dogs to these allotments could result in additional areas on the allotments which would be subject to these stipulations. Range improvement projects in the future could be further restricted by Utah prairie dog establishment and movement.

Soils

The proposed UPD translocation sites would result in up to three acres of surface disturbance where the colonies are established. Short term disturbance would occur from the preparing of the sites before the translocations. This impact would be mitigated when the areas were revegetated. UPD burrows could also alter soil profiles in these areas in the long term.

Special Status Wildlife Species

Greater sage-grouse might be temporarily affected by the disturbance of humans and equipment in the area, but since the vegetation removal and transplanting of prairie dogs would take place outside of brooding-rearing season, impacts would be considered discountable. The longer-term presence of Utah prairie dogs in the area would not be expected to conflict with the health of the Utah sage-grouse population in the area.

Utah prairie dogs would be affected by the proposed action. While translocation is not always successful, the removal of the animals from private land to public land would help to improve species recovery in the long term.

Temporary habitat loss of greater sage-grouse habitat would be mitigated by reseeding the area with desirable forbs and grasses. Reseeding of the area with forb and grass species palatable to Utah prairie dogs would also improve the likelihood of successful transplantation

NO ACTION

The no action alternative would not have any impacts on the affected environment at the translocation sites. The vegetation at the sites would not be improved. In order to meet recovery goals, translocation sites for Utah prairie dogs would need to found elsewhere, with similar impacts to special status species. Other areas might have resource concerns not expected at the proposed location.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. The only impact anticipated from the proposed action is the cumulative impact to Utah prairie dogs. In the long term, the translocation should help to off-set impacts to Utah prairie dogs caused by plague, predation and loss of habitat in other areas.

CHAPTER 5

PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

During preparation of the EA, the public was notified of the proposed action by posting on the BLM eplanning website on June 1, 2015. No comments have been received from the public. A public comment period was not offered because very little interest in the proposal has been expressed.

List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted

Name	Purpose & Authorities for Consultation or Coordination	Findings & Conclusions
Utah State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	Consultation for undertakings, as required by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 USC 470)	No cultural resources would be affected. The project will be reviewed by SHPO as part of the quarterly submittal as per existing protocol.
Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah	Consultation as required by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (42 USC 1531) and NHPA (16 USC 1531)	In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Paiute Tribe of Utah and the BLM, this project does not require formal consultation.
Utah Div. of Wildlife Resources	Consult with UDWR as the agency with expertise on impacts on game species.	Data and analysis regarding big game species incorporated into Chapters 3 and 4.

List of Preparers

BLM staff specialists who determined the affected resources for this document are listed in Appendix B. Those who contributed further analysis in the body of this EA are listed below.

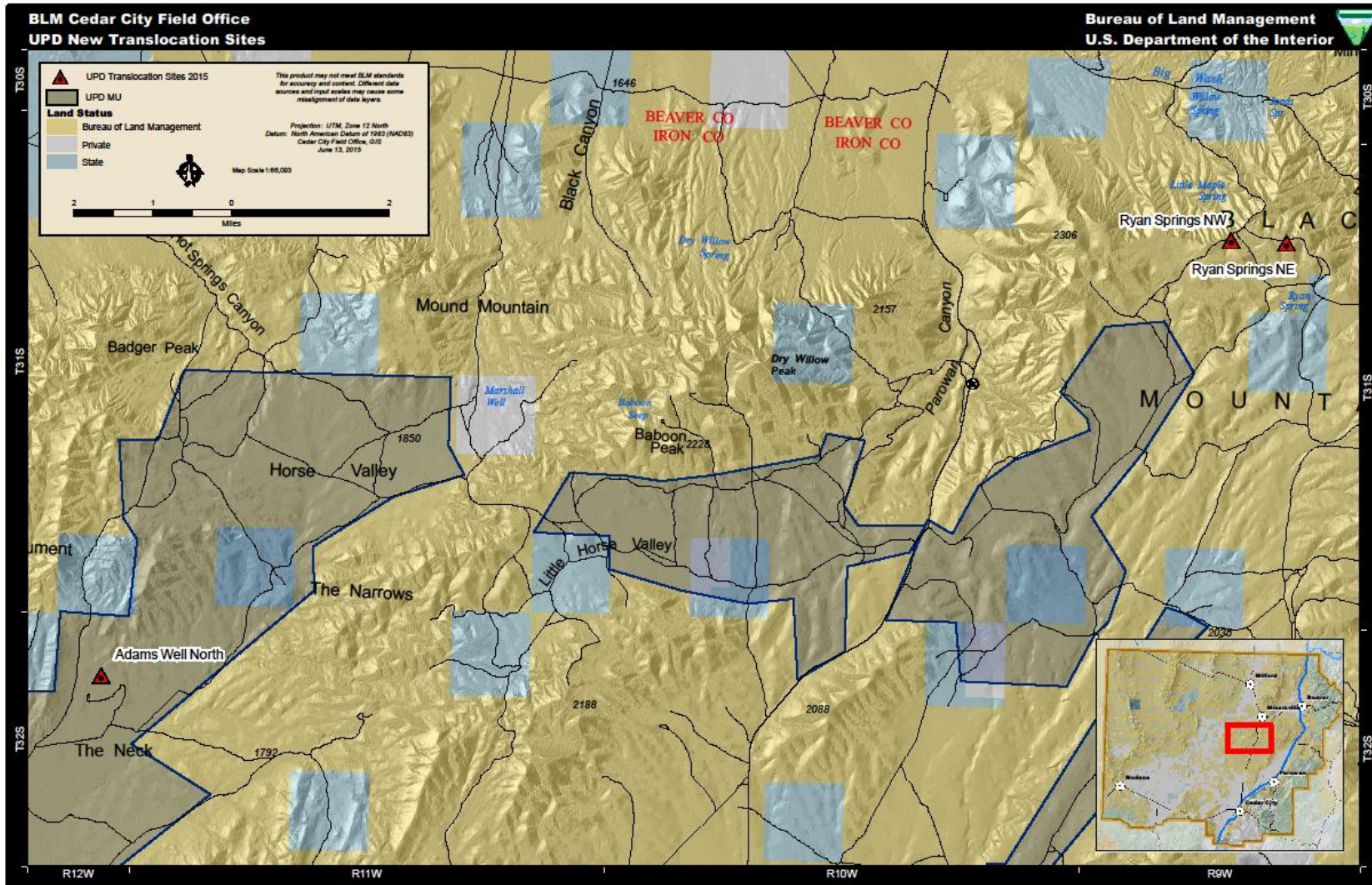
BLM Preparers

Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Sheri Whitfield	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife
Adam Stephens	Rangeland Management Specialist	Soils
Gina Ginouves	NEPA Specialist	Document Review
Jeff Reese	Rangeland Management Specialist	Livestock Grazing

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Translocation Sites



APPENDIX B

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM NEPA CHECKLIST

Project Title: Utah Prairie Dog Translocation/Nest Boxes

NEPA Log Number: DOI-BLM-UT-C010-2015-0042

File/Serial Number:

Project Leader: Sheri Whitfield 435-865-3065

DETERMINATION OF STAFF: *(Choose one of the following abbreviated options for the left column)*

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for relevant impact that need to be analyzed in detail in the EA

NC = (DNAs only) actions and impacts not changed from those disclosed in the existing NEPA documents cited in Section D of the DNA form.

The rationale column should include NI and NP discussions.

RESOURCES AND ISSUES CONSIDERED:

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination	Signature	Date
NI	Air Quality	The proposed project would not be expected to impact air quality over time. There may be a temporary increase of dust in the air as a result of translocation site preparation and travel to these sites, but this would not be expected to actually degrade air quality.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	There are no ACECs within the CCFO	Dave Jacobson	6-8-2015
NI	Cultural Resources	A Class III inventory will need to take place in areas that do not have a recent cultural resource inventory. Avoidance of all historic properties will be the preferred method of mitigation for this project. If a historic property cannot be avoided than this project will have a PI determination. Update 10 June: A Class III inventory has been completed; historic properties will be avoided. NI	Jamie Palmer	5/27/2015 6/10/2015
NI	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	The proposed project would not be expected to result in release of excessive Greenhouse gas emissions.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NI	Environmental Justice	The proposed project would not impact Environmental Justice.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NP	Farmlands (Prime or Unique)	There are no Farmlands (Prime or Unique) associated with the proposed UPD translocation sites.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NI	Fish and Wildlife	Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.	S. Whitfield	6/10/2015
NI	Floodplains	The proposed project would not be expected to impact Floodplains in the project area.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NI	Fuels/Fire Management	The proposed project in itself would not impact fire or fuels management.	S Peterson	6/12/15

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination	Signature	Date
NI/PI	Geology / Mineral Resources/Energy Production	<p>At present, there are no known mineral minerals present in the translocation areas other than deposits of common variety mineral materials. The lands are prospectively valuable for oil and gas and geothermal resources. Both Ryan Springs and Bald Hills Translocation sites fall on active oil and gas leases (UTU-84515, 84504 & 84505) which will not expire until June 30, 2016. While no lease operations are currently pending on these lease holds, it is entirely possible that lease operations will be proposed prior to the expiration date of the leases. The introduction of prairie dogs into the leasehold area will certainly complicate/constrain any efforts at lease operations.</p> <p>6/9/2015 update: The lessees were contacted regarding the proposed action, and one, the holder of the controlling interest in the leases, PAR Petroleum, responded. PAR indicated that the two Bald Hills sites were of primary concern to them. If the proposed action is modified to remove these sites, the impact to any potential lease operations is believed to be adequately mitigated.</p>	E. Ginouves	5/27/2015 6/9/2015
NI	Hydrologic Conditions	The proposed project would not be expected to impact Hydrologic Conditions in the project area.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NI	Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds	Noxious weeds are within the translocation area, with design features implemented in the NEPA that Equipment will be washed and avoiding noxious weed areas there will be no impact with this proposal. Noxious weed infestations are spread in part by the movement of animals, including wildlife, livestock, and by the transport of seed through physical contact and ingestion and transportation of motorized vehicles. The small, isolated noxious weed infestations should eventually be reduced in the future with the continuation of the noxious weed program which is implemented by the Cedar City Field Office. The Cedar City Field Office currently has an aggressive noxious weed control program and annually removes large quantities of noxious weeds throughout BLM administered lands in both Iron and Beaver counties. The BLM coordinates with County, State and Federal agencies in order to locate, treat and monitor noxious weed infestations throughout both counties.	J. Bulloch	6/10/15
NI	Lands/Access	<p>There are currently no authorized or pending realty actions in the proposed translocation sites. However, the Clipper Windpower Inc. meteorological monitoring right-of-way, UTU-80881 (closed in 2007), monitored wind in the area of the Bald Hills and Ryan Springs translocation sites.</p> <p>Access should be in the means of utilizing existing roads and trails. The drive and crush method should one be utilized when necessary, but is preferred instead of blading.</p>	M. Campeau	05/28/15
PI	Livestock Grazing	<p>The Translocation of Utah Prairie dogs is expected in have some impact on Livestock grazing.</p> <p>The Translocation of Prairie dogs in the Minersville 5 Allotment would be expected to impact the terms and conditions of the allotment. The Minersville 5 Allotment does not fall under the programmatic Utah Prairie Dog Agreement</p>	J. Reese	6/10/2015

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination	Signature	Date
NI	Migratory Birds	Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.	S. Whitfield	6/10/2015
NI	Native American Religious Concerns	In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding, March 1999, between the Paiute Tribe of Utah and the BLM, this project does not require formal consultation.	Jamie Palmer	06/10/15
NI	Paleontology	The surficial geology of the translocation sites is Quaternary alluvium derived from adjacent bedrock exposures of Tertiary-age volcanics. Utilizing the Bureau's Potential Fossil Yield Classification System, the potential for occurrence of scientifically significant fossil resources in these formation is very low (Class 1) and so the probability of impacting fossils is negligible. Neither assessment nor mitigation measures specific to fossil resources is warranted.	E. Ginouves	5/27/15
NI	Rangeland Health Standards	The Proposed Action would not be expected to impact the Rangeland Health Standards due to the small amount of disturbance associated with the translocation sites.	J. Reese	5/10/2015
NI	Recreation	The translocation sites are not within any SRMA or designated recreation sites. Dispersed recreation such as camping, hunting and vehicular exploration occurs within the proposed sites. Recreational activities will not be impaired by the proposed action.	Dave Jacobson	6-8-2015
NI	Socio-Economics	Socio-Economics should not be impacted from the proposed UPD translocation sites.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
PI	Soils	The proposed UPD translocation sites would result in surface disturbance where they are established. UPD burrows will also alter soil profiles in these areas where UPD colonies establish.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NI	Special Status Plant Species	There are no known Special Status Plant Species in or adjacent to the project area.	J. Reese	6/4/15
PI	Special Status Animal Species	The translocation sites are located in sage grouse and UPD habitat. See text of EA.	S. Whitfield	6/10/2015
NI	Wastes (hazardous or solid)	There are no waste issues known in the proposed area, nor will translocation create wastes in itself. The only "potential" waste stream, should it be used, would be from mechanical equipment use to clear vegetation. Even with the use of equipment, wastes would be highly unlikely and would only require action should an accidental release occur due to breakdown. Should such an incident occur, federal and state regulation will require proper reporting and mitigation for anything above reportable quantities.	R. Peterson	6/10/15
NI	Water Resources/Quality (drinking/surface/ground)	The proposed project would not have impacts on Water Resources/Quality.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NP	Wetlands/Riparian Zones	There are no Wetlands/Riparian Zones associated with the proposed project.	A. Stephens	6/9/2015
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers within the CCFO	Dave Jacobson	6-8-2015
NP	Wilderness/WSA	The proposed project is not within or near Wilderness or a Wilderness Study Area.	Dave Jacobson	6-8-2015
NP	Woodland / Forestry	The proposed project is not within any woodland/Forestry areas	C. Peterson	06-08-15

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination	Signature	Date
NI	Vegetation	The Proposed action would be expected to remove vegetation where the translocation boxed would be placed but due to the relatively small disturbance sites there no impact is expected. Translocation sites should be reseeded following project implementation.	J. Reese	6/10/2015
NI	Visual Resources	The proposed project will not impair the landscape so as to change the visual quality. The project area is within VRM Class IV.	Dave Jacobson	6-8-2015
NP	Wild Horses and Burros	The Proposed Project is not within or adjacent to any wild horse Herd Area (HA) or Herd Management Area (HMA).	C. Hunter	5/27/15
NP	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	The proposed locations are not within areas that were identified as having wilderness characteristics in the 2011 and updated 2014 wilderness characteristics inventory.	Dave Jacobson	6-8-2015

FINAL REVIEW:

Reviewer Title	Signature	Date	Comments
Environmental Coordinator	<i>Gina Gincaves</i>	6/15/2015	
Authorized Officer			